



**THE ENGLISH CLUB
RESOURCE PACKET**

HOLES

Louis Sachar

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Reading *Holes*

Keep a reading journal on *Holes*. This novel tells several different stories and, as you read on, you are invited to think about how these stories fill the holes in the story of the central character.

In your reading journal, as you read *Holes*:

- Make a list of the characters you encounter.
- Organise them in sets for each story in which they appear
- As you see connections between characters from different stories, make a note of the ways in which you were able to link them. At what point in your reading did you make the link? Why?

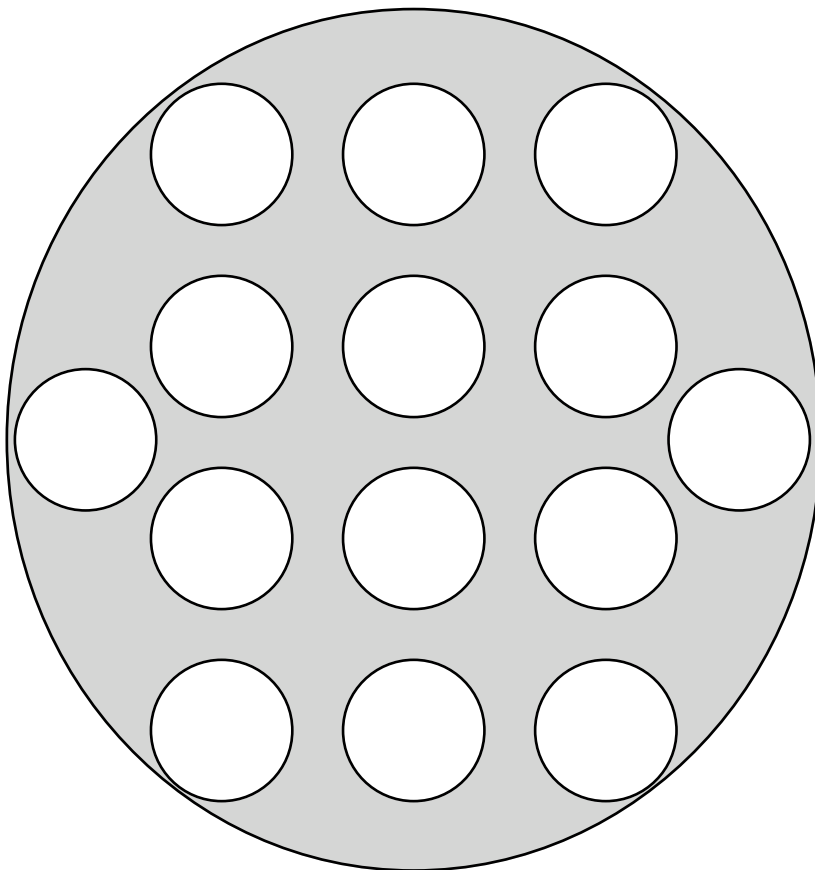
Filling the Holes in the Story: Connections and Coincidences

When you have finished reading, form a small group and discuss the connections you have made and how you made them.

Imagine that Stanley's story is one big area like Camp Green Lake which is full of holes. What stories and hints from the novel can fill these holes in Stanley's story? Why?

Taking a double page of your journal, or an A3 sheet of paper, draw a large circle as shown below. Fill the circles with information from the novel which helped you and other members of the group piece together the story of Stanley Yelnats IV.

Elya
Madam Zeroni
Sam the onion man
Kate Barlow
Stanley Yelnats I
Trout Walker
Zero



red hair
onions
boat
songs
sneakers
Mary Lou
thumb
peaches

Reading Stanley's Story

What is a coincidence? Write in your journal about the coincidences that occurred in the story. Did you feel at the end that they were more than coincidences?

EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS

Using the activities below, explore the characters in the story. Which characters change or grow? Who stays much the same?

Stanley and Zero

Using the chart below, trace the ways in which the characters of Stanley and Zero change and develop in the story. Which events in the story change the way they think and act? Why?

Stage	Changes in Stanley	Why?	Changes in Zero	Why?
1	First days at Camp Green Lake • •	Events	"there's nothing inside his head." • •	Events
2	Starts to teach Zero to read • •		Digs holes for Stanley • •	
3	Release from Camp Green Lake • •		Reads the name on the suitcase • •	

Discussing Stanley and Zero

- "He needed to save his energy for people who counted." Who says this? Why?
- Why does Zero leave the camp?
- Why does Stanley go to look for Zero?
- "I'm just drinking so you will." What does this statement tell you about Stanley and Zero?

Group D

"My name's not Thee-o-dore ... It's Armpit."

- What are the nicknames of the following characters?

Rex
Theodore
Brian
Alan
Jose
Ricky

- Why do you think the boys prefer their nicknames to their real names?
- In what order do they line up for water?
- Why do you think they always line up in the same order?
- What does Caveman do with the lipstick tube he finds and why?

Write a brief portrait of the leader of the boys in Group D.

Role playing Stanley and Zero

Imagine that Zero and Stanley have an opportunity to tell X-Ray, Armpit and the others about their journey to the mountain and back. Working in a small group, present a role play of this conversation. Show how they have changed in their outlook and their attitude to each other.

Camp Authorities

Using the items listed under each of the following characters, discuss each character's role in the story. Then write a brief portrait of each character.

The Warden
fingernails
cowboy boots
red hair

- Why does the Warden make the boys dig holes?
- How does she treat members of her staff?

Mr Sir
sunflower seeds
water
Girl Scout camp

- What role does he have at the camp?
- How would you describe Mr Sir's behaviour towards Stanley?

Mr Pendanski
Mom
black eyes
bandaged nose

- Is Mr Pedanski an effective counsellor? Why or why not?
- How does he treat Zero? Why?

Identifying the Roles of the Characters in the Side Stories

What roles do you think characters such as Elya, Kate Barlow and Sam, the onion man, play in the story of Stanley at Camp Green Lake? Why do you think the author told these stories? Investigate these questions by discussing the roles of each of the following characters. Use a chart as shown below.

Character	Personal details	Role in the story
Elya	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where was he born?• Why did he go to America?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does he have to do to marry Myra Menke? Why wouldn't he?• Was he really a no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealer?
Madame Zeroni	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How old is she?• Do you think she is the gypsy woman in Stanley's family history?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What promise to Madame Zeroni does Elya break?• In what way does Madame Zeroni appear in Stanley's life?
Kate Barlow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why is she called Kissin' Kate Barlow?• How did she die?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why does she refuse to marry Trout Walker?• Why does she become an outlaw?• What does she steal from Stanley's great grandfather?
Sam, the onion man	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What skills does he have?• Where is his secret onion field?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why was kissing Kate such a crime for Sam ?• What saves Stanley and Zero twice?• Why did people use Sam's onion remedies?

Explaining the Roles of These Characters

In your journal, write about the the roles of these characters in the story of Stanley Yeltnats at Camp Green Lake. Why do you think it was important for the author to tell their stories?

Interview: What Drove Stanley Yeltnats?

Form a team and present an interview with Stanley after he has been released from Camp Green Lake.

Imagine you are a team of newspaper reporters. Reports of Stanley's false imprisonment and his heroic adventures on the mountain have already appeared in the media. Your interview and a feature article to follow will focus on Stanley's motives, ie:

What drove him to do such things as:

- Give the gold tube to X-Ray?
- Teach Zero to read?
- Try to find Zero?
- Carry the sick Zero up the mountain?
- Go back to Camp Green Lake?

- 1 Decide which member of the group will play the role of Stanley.
- 2 Re-read the text and locate passages that suggest important reasons that explain why Stanley acted as he did.
- 3 From these passages, frame a list of key questions to ask Stanley, and work together to develop answers that the person playing Stanley will give.
- 4 Read passages where Stanley is involved in a conversation and write the answers to your key questions in a similar style to his speech.
- 5 Present the interview to the class. While listening to other presentations, make a note in your journal of interesting questions and answers developed by other groups.
- 6 Write an article for a young people's magazine in which you use this material to answer the question: What drove Stanley Yeltnats?

INVESTIGATING HOW THE STORY IS TOLD

Exploring the Setting: Times and Places

Working with a partner, investigate the following questions about the setting of *Holes*:

- Could Stanley's story have happened anywhere, or only at a place like Green Lake?
- What other times and places influence events in Stanley's story? How?

1 Time and Place: Stanley at Camp Green Lake

Draw a map showing the various features of Camp Green Lake during Stanley's time there, eg:

- Green Lake or "frying pan"
- Mountains
- Old town and schoolhouse
- Extent of the holes
- Warden's cabin
- Boys' tents
- Group D's holes, including Stanley's hole and X-Ray's hole
- Truck in a hole
- Stanley's route to the mountains
- Boat
- Cliffs
- Mountain where Stanley carries Zero
- Sam's onion field
- Water hole
- God's thumb
- Peach trees
- Trout Walker's land
- Kate Barlow's cabin.

Create a *legend* for the map. For each feature you mark on the map, write a short note explaining the events that happened there. Number these notes and use arrows to point to each location.

Discussing the Setting of Camp Green Lake

In your reading journal, write some brief responses to the following questions about the setting. Develop this material so that you can contribute to the group discussion to follow.

- Why is Green Lake an appropriate place for a prison camp? Think of more than one reason.
- Why is Camp Green Lake an *ironic* name?
- Is digging holes the only form of punishment or "correction"? Explain your view.
- Why are the boys made to dig holes?
- Why do you think the holes extend such a long way, including around the Warden's cabin?
- What is the full title of the prison camp? What does the title mean? Do you think it lived up to its name? Why or why not?
- Which features of the setting do you think play an active part in the way the story develops? Why?

Form a discussion group with another pair of students and:

- Compare your maps. Discuss any differences between them and why this is so.
- Discuss your responses to the questions above.
- Present a group response to the class on the last question.

2 Stanley's Home

- Where?
- Stories?
- Song?
- School?
- Bonds?
- Father's work?

How does this story connect with and influence Stanley's story?

3 Great-Great-Grandfather's Time

- Where?
- When?
- Events?
- Song?
- Madame Zeroni's son?

How does this story connect with and influence Stanley's story?

4 Green Lake in the Time of Kate and Sam

- When?
- Events?
- Sam's work?
- Story of Kate?
- Laws?
- Green Lake?
- Great-grandfather story?

How does this story connect with and influence Stanley's story?

Discuss the ways in which each of these times and places connects with and influences what happens in Stanley's time at Camp Green Lake. Write about these influences in your journal.

Investigating the Humour in the Novel

Did you find the story amusing? If so, was it a side-splitting experience or more a case of laughing inside? What made you smile or laugh while you were reading the novel? Find out by investigating the humour in the novel.

The Witty Way the Author Tells the Story

- 1 Form a group of readers and present a reading or dramatisation of Mr Pendanski's counselling session with the boys (Chapter 12).
- 2 Work out how many readers you will need and form a group of that size.
- 3 Discuss the way the author tells the story in the passage. Allot parts for the characters.
- 4 Decide on how much of the author's words will be read by a narrator.
- 5 Practise the reading so that the readers bring out the jokes in the passage.
- 6 Think about the distinctive tone of voice that the author uses throughout the novel and try to catch that tone in your narrator's voice.
- 7 Make the presentation and afterwards explain how you tried to convey the humour in the passage.
- 8 Listen for the ways the humour is created in other groups' presentations.
- 9 Write a report in your journal about the ways the author creates the humour in this passage.

Funny Moments in the Story

The author creates humour or comedy in different ways. Think back over your reading of the novel and make a list of the humorous moments in the story. For example, can you recall and locate:

- Comic characters — Who are they? Do you think they were ridiculed or satirised by the author?
- Running jokes — What joke about digging holes is made at several points in the story?
- One liners — A joke in one or two lines (eg, Doc Hawthorn's head) Others?
- Repartee — What examples of witty replies or conversation can you find?
- Irony — It's *ironic* that the people of Green Lake will let Sam fix the schoolhouse roof but not attend night classes. Can you find other examples of this dark kind of humour?

Write a piece in your journal about:

- two or three funny moments in the story and what made you laugh or smile
- the messages these events sent you as a reader.

Identifying Conflict

The humour in the novel helps to relieve some of the darker moments of the story.

- What are some of the moments of conflict in the story?
- What causes these conflicts?
- At what point does the conflict reach its peak?
- Is the conflict resolved? If so, how?

Using the chart below, identify these aspects of each conflict listed in the left-hand column.

Conflict	Causes	Peak event	Resolution
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Sir and Stanley• The Warden and Mr Sir• Zigzag and Stanley• Kate and Trout Walker• Kate and the people of Green Lake• Zero and Mr Pendanski• The Warden and Stanley	<i>What events lead up to the conflict?</i>	<i>Does the conflict climax in some way? If so, how?</i>	<i>Is the conflict resolved, ie, settled? If so, how?</i>

Discussion Point:

"The boys have all broken the law in some way but there is very little conflict between them. Most of the time, they act more like friends." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Write an argument for or against this statement and then present it to a small group.

Exploring Images, Symbols and Themes

An *image* is a picture in your mind created by the author's words.

A *symbol* is an image, object or event that represents or stands for something important.

A *theme* is a general idea, lesson or message about life and living generated by the kind of story told.

- What themes are suggested by the images and symbols used by the author to describe the events in *Holes*?

Using the chart below, discuss:

- how particular images develop the themes of the story
- how particular images become symbols for certain themes or ideas.

If necessary, use images more than once.

Images	Themes	Key Events	Symbols
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • onions • sunflower seeds • painted fingernails • frying pan • schoolhouse • Tag, you're it • Girl Scout • peaches • weeds and bugs • magnet • sneakers • sweet feet • water • water hole • fossil • sundaes • thumb • mountain • lizard • cowboy hat and boots • sploosh • kissing • pig • letters • reading • holes • the last hole • rain/cloud <p>Add other images if you wish.</p>	<p>Here are some possible themes of the novel <i>Holes</i>. With which images do you associate these ideas?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice • Family values • Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendship Love Family • Education • Prejudice or Racism • Environment • Fate or Destiny • Identity • Conflict 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Make a list of the events with which you associate each theme and each image or set of images. 2 What aspect of the theme do these events suggest? Why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which images do you think stand for or <i>symbolise</i> particular themes of the novel? Why? • For example, which images are repeated or <i>recur</i> throughout the novel? What do they bring to your mind each time?

Presenting Themes

Form a theme team, choose one of the themes below and make a presentation to the class on how the theme is developed by the story in *Holes*.

<p>Justice</p> <p><i>"If you take a bad boy and make him dig a hole every day in the hot sun, it will turn him into a good boy." (p5)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was Stanley a "bad boy"? Why was Stanley sent to the camp? Was this just or fair? • What kind of justice did Kate and Sam receive? • Was the Warden just in her dealings with the boys and her officers? Why or why not? • What messages about the system of justice in Texas did the novel send you? Why? 	<p>Friendship</p> <p><i>"I'm just drinking so you will." (p193)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways does this statement suggest the firm friendship between Stanley and Zero? • How did this friendship develop? • In what ways did Stanley learn to admire Zero? • Why did Stanley agree to teach Zero to read — just to get his holes dug? • Why does Stanley set out to look for Zero? 	<p>Family</p> <p><i>"For his parents, the pain would never end." (p163)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It wasn't impossible." What wasn't and why? • How do thoughts of his family help Stanley survive the camp life and the journey to the mountains? • How does his mother's song help Stanley? • What kind of letters does Stanley write to his mother? Why? • Why did the Warden feel that she could destroy Zero's records?
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Prejudice

"but they let him fix the building." (p109)

- Why do you think the people of Green Lake believed that God would punish Kate Barlow for kissing Sam?
- Re-read the passage where the Sheriff explains the law (p114). Why do you think the law was expressed like that? Could that law work today? Why or why not?
- In what ways is Zero the victim of prejudice at Camp Green Lake?

Education

"It shows how much we value education here in Green Lake." (p110)

- Why is this statement *ironic*?
- In what ways is Sam more educated than the people of Green Lake?
- Do you think the people of Green Lake deserved a good teacher like Kate Barlow? Why or why not?
- In what ways does the character of Stanley show the value of education, both at school and from home?

Destiny and Fate

"It was more than a coincidence. It had to be destiny." (p187)

- Why is Stanley so happy on the mountain, especially about the sneakers?
- What acted like "a giant magnet" pulling Stanley toward it? Why?
- What are the clues to his destiny that Stanley finds or recognises?
- Was Stanley destined to carry Zero up the mountain? If so, why?
- In what ways are sneakers a symbol of Stanley's destiny?

Identity

"My name's Caveman."

- Why does Stanley accept the name Caveman?
- Why do the boys prefer to be called by their nicknames?
- What status does Zero have in Group D? Why?
- Why do you think he tells Stanley his real name?
- What role does Stanley's sense of identity play in his behaviour and survival at Camp Green Lake?
- At what point in the story do you think Zero reveals a new identity? How?

Conflict

- Why is the fight between Zigzag and Zero unusual?
- Do you think there is more conflict between the camp officials than between the boys? If so, why?
- What do you think is the cause of much of the conflict in the novel?
- What causes the conflict between Mr Sir and Stanley?
- What causes the conflict between Kate and Trout Walker?
- Do you think the story is a fight between good and evil?

Writing about Themes

Write a longer piece about an important theme or themes of the novel. In other words, how do you read the novel? What important messages for life can you see in the story?

Begin the piece with a statement or proposition which you can support with ideas and information from the novel — eg, characters, events, images, symbols. Here are some examples of starting-points. Choose one of these statements or compose your own.

- *Holes is a story about the injustice done to young people.*
- *Twists of fate play major roles in the lives of the main characters in Holes.*
- *Holes shows the importance of friendship in times of trouble and danger.*
- *By the end of the story, both Stanley and Zero have a completely new sense of identity.*
- *"God will punish you." Whom do you think was punished in Holes. Why?*
- *Stanley's sense of family values and traditions kept him going.*

RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL

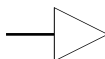
Here are some ideas for oral presentations and writing which enable you to show your understanding of *Holes*.

- 1 Begin by making one of the oral presentations below and listening to other presentations.
- 2 Then, drawing on the ideas and material you present and that you hear from other presenters, complete the writing task associated with your oral presentation.

Ideas for Oral Presentations

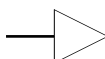
1 Conversation: Stanley and His Mother

Play the roles of Stanley and his mother when he returns home. Present a conversation in which he tells his mother what life was really like at Camp Green Lake and how he thinks he has destroyed the family curse.



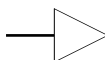
2 Sneakers

Form a team and present a mini-lesson of 10-15 minutes in which you show how sneakers are an important symbol of the twists of fate in the story of *Holes*.



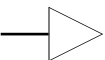
3 Exploring the Narrative

Form a team and present a mini-lesson of 10-15 minutes in which you show how the author tells the story. Focus on chapter 8 or chapter 23. Why is this episode placed there? What connections backwards and forwards in the story can you find? Why do you think the author built his story in this way?



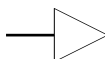
4 Onions

"An onion a day, while not good for the breath, could be good for the heart." (Report from Government scientists, 27/9/01) Research the health-giving qualities of onions and present a Health show segment in which you show how close Sam was to the truth about onions.



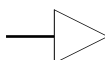
5 "He had nobody" ... "He was nobody."

Present a role play in which, as Pendanski, you tell what you thought of Zero. Use a tone of voice that expresses the contempt you showed for him. Then, ask a partner to play Stanley and tell Pendanski what he missed and what he (Stanley) saw in Zero.



6 "If only ..."

Present readings — individual or choral — of Stanley's song and Hector's mother's song. Use different tones of voice wherever needed. If possible, find or compose a tune for singing the songs. In between the songs, present a reading of a passage to which you think the songs particularly relate.



Ideas for Writing

1 Letter from Stanley

Imagine that Stanley had written a letter to his mother in which he described what his time at Camp Green Lake was really like. Include some events that show what drove Stanley to take certain actions. Write the letter.

2 A Date with Destiny

"What goes around, comes around. Eventually. Stanley and Zero have a date with destiny." Write a piece in which you explain how the novel *Holes* tells the story of a date with destiny.

3 The Author Explains

Imagine you are Louis Sachar and you are asked the following question by a reader:

- Why do you often interrupt the story of Stanley Yelnats in order to tell other stories?

Explain what you tried to achieve by writing the story as you did.

4 Onions

Write about onions as a symbol in *Holes*. In what different ways were onions useful in the story? What did the people of Green Lake use them for? What did they mean to Zero and Stanley? What, then, is ironic about Sam's story?

5 "When you spend your whole life living in a hole, the only way you can go is up." (Zero)

At what point in the story does Zero start to go up? Why? Write a piece in which, as Zero, you explain how meeting Stanley changed your life.

6 "If only ..."

Tell the story of the novel as you think it relates to the "If only..." songs. Focus on three or four key passages or episodes in the novel that you think connect closely to the songs, and explain why.